

# **The Role Of Reflection In The Network-Based Microteaching**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigated the perception of TESL trainees toward peers' reflections, combined with the role of reflection on the use of digital language lab in order to teach effectively in a network-based environment. Nine students participated in a regular micro-teaching course on writing and presenting their lesson plans. In educational teaching class trainees were prompted to reflect on their micro-teaching process. In this study the role of reflection was investigated and teacher trainees tried to consciously evaluate their activities in the microteaching classroom. Since 'reflection' provided this opportunity for teacher trainees to be more self-oriented in the educational teaching forum, this study aimed to find the advantages and disadvantages of writing reflections from teacher trainees' perspectives.

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Reflection has a very crucial role in learning processes and is very useful for developing learning performance. Most institutions today are actively promoting learners' reflection ability in order to help them compete with the fast changing world they will be entering when they graduate. Online learning provides opportunities for implementing new teaching and learning strategies. But, it has not yet been systematically studied how to concretely apply reflection strategies in an online learning environment.

Reflection is a constructive cognitive capability linking thought and action and can play a different role in intellectual activities. The reflection can be corroborated by the social constructivist theories posited by Dewey (1933) who considered reflection to be a special form of problem solving or thinking to resolve an issue which involved active chaining, a careful ordering of ideas linking each with its predecessors. Within the process, consideration is to be given to any form of knowledge or belief involved and the grounds for its support, (Adler, 1991; Cutler, Cook & Young, 1989; Calderhead, 1989; Gilson, 1989; Farrah, 1988). Dewey's opinions are original, and show that reflection is seen as an active and collaborative cognitive act, which are sequence of bounded ideas inclusive of the underlying beliefs and thoughts. Reflective thinking generally addresses practical problems, allows for doubts and strangeness before possible solutions are proposed. In this study, the teacher trainees practiced peer feedback and reflective writing in order to write better lesson plan and achieve constructive ideas from their peers.

In relation to reflective thinking versus reflective action, there seems to be wide agreement that reflection is a special form of thought, (Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991; McNamara, 1990; Kremer-Hayon, 1988; Waxman et al., 1988). But Dewey himself also spoke of 'reflective action' presumably addressing the implementation of solutions once problems had been through, and it is clear that most writers are concerned with the complete cycle of professional 'doing' coupled with reflection which then leads to modified action (Noffke & Brennan, 1988; Gore & Zeichner, 1984). It may be useful to contrast this cyclical idea with routine action, which derives from impulse, tradition or authority. Reflective action is bound up with persistent and careful consideration of practice in the light of knowledge and beliefs, showing attitudes of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness, (Noffke &

Brennan, 1988). In this study, teacher trainees are supposed to be involved in a wide range of thinking skills leading toward desirable outcomes and reflective thinking focuses on the process of making judgments about what has happened. However, reflective thinking is important in prompting teacher trainees during complex problem-solving in network-based microteaching because it provides trainees with an opportunity to step back and think about how they actually solve problems and how a particular set of problem solving strategies is appropriated for achieving their goal and writing good lesson plan.

The ability to monitor one's thought processes and translate them into actions should be extended to evaluative thinking. The element of evaluative thinking is present in concept of "reflection-on-action" which is referred to as "an action planned on the basis of post-hoc thinking and deliberation (Grimmett, 1988). It is this aspect of reflection that will be the guiding principle or working definition for this study which focuses on examining reflection in network based environment.

## **2.0 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

One of the most important problems which teacher trainees are confronting in Malaysia is that they do not have enough practice on group works and collaborative learning. Since collaborative learning and group discussion play a very crucial role in sharing experiences and knowledge, therefore, such an environment like microteaching could be helpful for them. Moreover, the conventional educational teaching syllabus could not satisfy all the aspects of trainees' requirement and teaching skills due to the lack of reflective criticism in the class atmosphere. Therefore, it is suggested that teacher trainees should equip themselves with skills such as using reflection in a network-based environment. Besides, trainees usually do not have enough opportunities to express their own experiences and ideas toward teaching, however, this research tries to pave the way for more interactions and discussions and identify their perceptions toward network based microteaching and reflection.

## **3.0 RESEARCH SETTING**

As a case study, this research was descriptive where it used qualitative methods. This research investigates (1) the perception of the teacher trainees toward reflection and (2) the role of reflection in the microteaching process.

This research is qualitative as it attempts to identify the perception of trainees toward reflection. It adopted an inductive process of descriptive data collection and analysis of real life events. Data from the researcher's observation from the students' interaction and their feeling in network based environment, the participants' responses and video recording were analyzed from a qualitative point of view to achieve a deeper understanding.

### **3.1 Participants Of The Study**

This study included 9 TESL trainees from Faculty of Education in UTM. They have just taken educational teaching class as a compulsory course, microteaching, writing and presenting lesson plan. Each participant coded as A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I to show confidentiality.

## **4.0 RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

The procedure of the study began with the selection of the participants. There were nine trainees of TESL who asked to join the microteaching class within the period of fifteen weeks. All of them were Malay and Chinese students with different level of English language proficiency. They were given a few guidelines and briefing about the online environment and how to participate actively in the discussion before they join the microteaching class. During the classes their presentations were recorded and their activities were observed. After they completed fifteen weeks duration they were interviewed by the researcher. At the end of each session they wrote their reflections on the activities and interactions in the lab.

This course took a 1 hour period a week; this brought the trainees together in an online setting. Both participants and the researcher were on line. The microteaching classes were conducted in one of the digital language labs of the Faculty of Management (University Technology of Malaysia).

In this research, trainees were divided in to three groups; 1: (A, B, C), 2: (D, E, F), 3: (G, H, I). Each group discussed on one lesson plan and then each trainee wrote his/her reflection on the whole process of discussion. Lastly, the trainees came up with the revised and improved lesson plan for the next class. Every other session trainees demonstrated their lesson plans through microteaching. When all the discussions were going on, the researcher was taking field notes while doing classroom observation.

## **5.0 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

At the end of each session they were supposed to write their reflections on their discussions, interactions and activities in the lab. Trainees had 10 minutes to write their reflections but they were allowed to stay 10 more minutes after their class. Lab observation has been done and field notes were taken as well as recording students teaching presentations every other session. Trainees presented their teaching in front of the others in the lab and then were video-recorded by the researcher who documented and observed for the analysis. Finally at the end of the 15 weeks period the trainees were interviewed by the researcher. The researcher selected 5 trainees by random and interviewed them in a semi-structure and subtle manner.

## **5.0 FINDINGS**

As mentioned in the previous part, data in this section was obtained through three instruments: Interviews, observation and reflective notes, each of which will be explained and discussed in detail below:

Five respondents were interviewed based on interview question which is related to reflection, which will be discussed in this section.

In response to the interview question “*What do you feel about reflective writing at the end of each session*”), Respondents’ replies are shown in Table.

Respondents’ replies to the interview question about trainees’ reflections

A	Reflection is a means of becoming clearer about subjects. It is also good for future trainees who are going to participate in microteaching class.
B	Reflective writing encourages you to consider and comment on your learning experiences—not only what you have learned, but how you did so.
C	At the end of each session, after too many activities, writing reflection is something that made me tired.
D	I think that it is a kind of boring task without any usefulness.
E	In order to clarify what you are learning, reflection helps you to clarify what you have studied, integrates new knowledge with previous knowledge, and identifies the questions you have and you avoid repeating them

As shown in table, trainee A believed that reflective writing may be “a means of becoming clearer about subjects”. While trainee D found reflective writing boring without any advantages for their lesson plan writing “I think that it is a kind of boring task without any usefulness”. Trainee B agreed with the effectiveness of reflective writing because “reflective writing encourages you to consider and comment on your learning experiences—not only what you have learned, but how you did so”. Trainee E added that “in order to clarify what you are learning, reflection helps you to clarify what you have studied”. Despite all the benefits, trainees C and D found reflective writing as a bit boring. “At the end of each session, after too many activities, writing reflection is something that made me tired”, trainee C believed.

In sum, it can be claimed that most of the trainees (A, B, E) found reflective writing useful and constructive not only for themselves but for “future trainees who would participate in microteaching classes”(table). However, they believed that reflective writing could be more attractive and persuasive through some obvious and helpful explanations which could be mentioned by instructor.

Findings from the observations indicated a mixed response from trainees. The researcher observed trainees’ reflective writings. A few of them welcomed the reflective writing activity, whilst others were not really interested in it.

The researcher noted that “trainees were involved in writing their reflections and concentrated on their writing but suddenly they left their jobs and started talking with their friends about how to write a reflection, few of them seemed tired because they looked at their watches repeatedly (every 2, 3 minutes) and wrote their reflections impatiently” (dated 20/01/09). Based on the researcher’s observation, writing reflection at the end of each microteaching class caused trainee’s carelessness since they were tired and did not find any logical reason for writing. On 17/02/09 the researcher observed some of the trainees (A, C, G) “who had technical difficulties (e.g. making mistakes in the format of the writing reflections)” which they were supposed to be prepared before entering microteaching class. Few of trainees were not familiar enough with the technology and it took their time for writing their reflections. On the other hand, it was observed that trainees (B, D, E, and F) “seemed very concentrated on their writings and carefully reviewed their activities which they have done during the class with their peers” (26/02/09).

It seems that few of trainees found reflective writing boring because in the first place they were not familiar with this activity which made them tired and secondly because they were not aware of the usefulness of this activity. Thus, it can be true to say that if they become more familiar with the activity and its usefulness they will be much more interested in this part.

As mentioned before, the data in this study also obtained through trainees' reflections. In this section the data will be illustrated and then discussed. Parts of the respondents' reflections are shown below.

Trainee (C): Writing reflection at the last moment of the class made us tired and I really wrote that fast without any concentration (04/02/09). Trainee (D): Reflective writing was a very useful task in the microteaching class it helped us to review our activities in the class and I can say that it was a kind of self-evaluation. However initially I was not interested in this activity I didn't see its usefulness. (13/01/09). Trainee (G): This system taught me a lot in using the comment button which is crucial to mark anything important in texts and documents. Also, lack of clarification about the usefulness of reflection. (04/02/09). Trainee (F): why are we supposed to write reflection, it is a kind of aimless activity and it is just wasting time" (06/01/09)

Based on the trainees' reflections, few of the teacher trainees found writing reflection boring and a useless activity as trainee C noted "writing reflection at the last moment of the class made us tired and I really wrote that fast without any concentration". Furthermore, trainee F believed that "why are we supposed to write reflection, it is a kind of aimless activity" it shows that the teacher trainees did not see the rationales in writing their reflections. On the other side of the story, trainee D believed that "reflective writing was a very useful task in the microteaching class it helped us to review our activities in the class and I can say that it was a kind of self-evaluation". Trainee G commented more accurately that reflective writing was helpful but "lack of clarification about the usefulness of reflection" made trainees impatient and unsatisfied about the goal of this activity.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Few of the teacher trainees did not feel satisfied during writing their reflections which based on their reflective notes was due to two reasons; firstly, they were not quite familiar with the format of writing reflective notes and second they were not aware of the advantages of this task. This dissatisfaction was also obvious during researcher's observations by behaviors such as looking at their watches repeatedly. However, in the final interview, more trainees expressed their satisfaction as compared with their reflective notes. It seems that it was due to the fact that they had already been aware of the advantages of this task and had already become familiar with the task and had obtained more skill in doing it. Some of the advantages of this task as mentioned by the trainees were; helping them to review their own activities in the class or self-evaluation, and clarifying what they had learned. They also believed that it could be treated as valuable documents for the next trainees and also an opportunity to reflect on their whole perspectives toward the microteaching.

In this study, it was absolutely clear that reflection in itself was an excellent tool which helped teacher trainees to develop and grow in confidence.

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